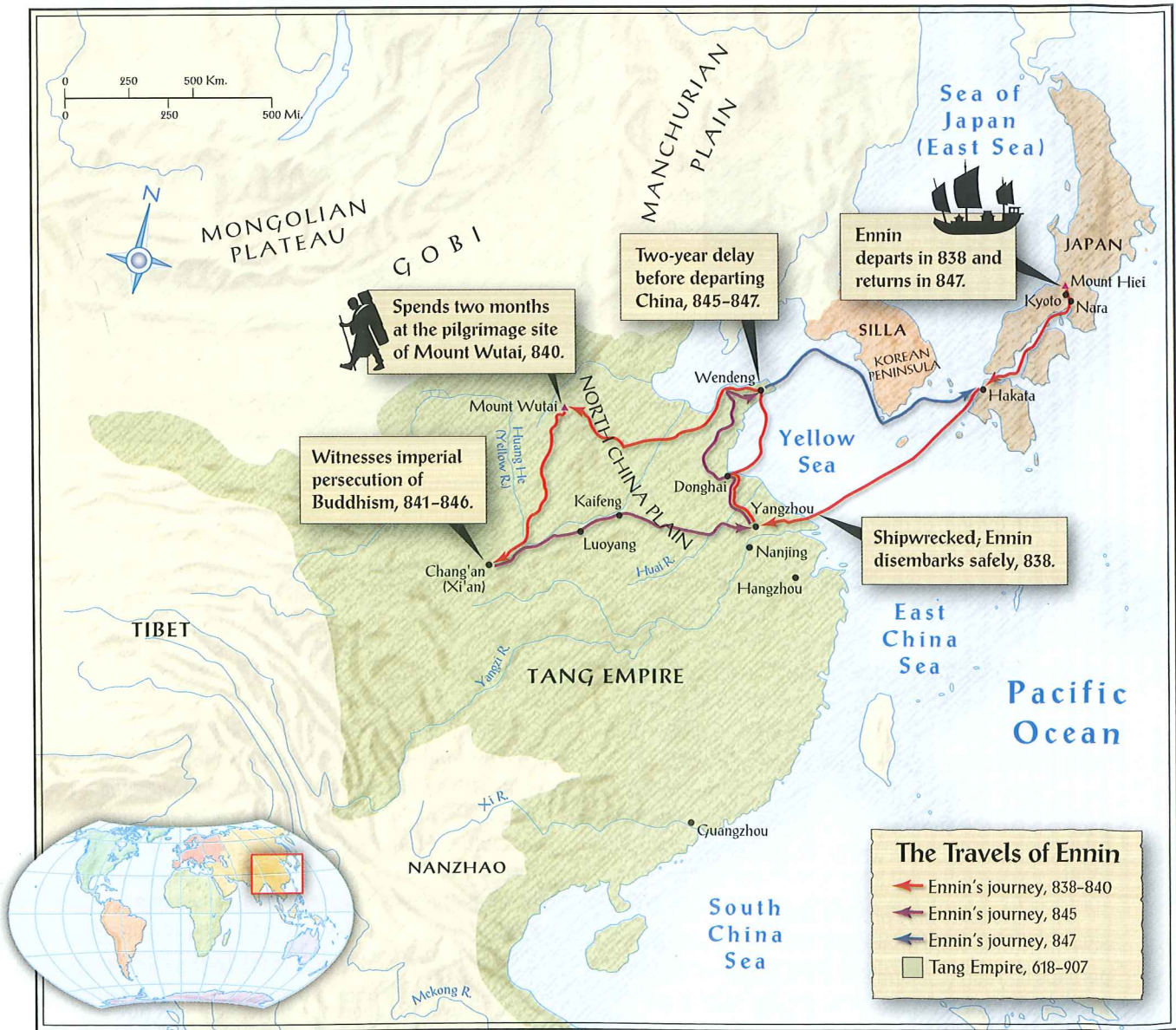


The Devotional Use of Buddhist Art in *Ennin's Diary*

Valerie Hansen



(Fig. 1)
(After V
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At the age of 44 or 45, the monk Ennin (794–864), one of the most respected teachers in the Japanese Tendai sect and in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, went to China (Figs 1 and 2). There he spent nine years studying texts and rituals. Ennin travelled to the Tang empire, which served as a model for all of East Asia, from Japan, whose rulers aspired to create a Tang-style state. Deservedly famous for its vivid portrayal of life during the Tang dynasty (618–907), his diary uniquely illuminates the making and use of Buddhist art by both clergy and laity.

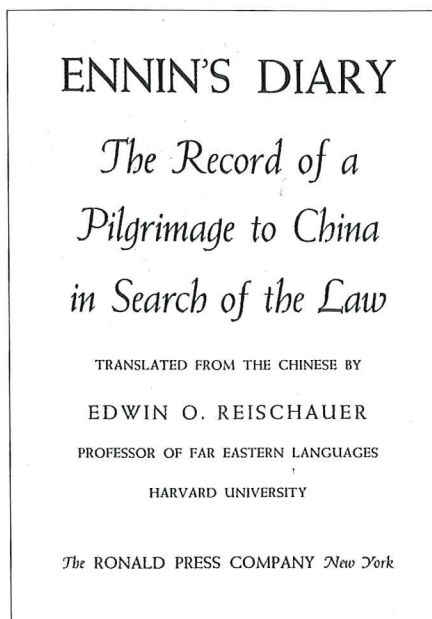
Ennin admires the craftsmanship and artistry of the paintings and statues he describes, but they are most important to him as ritual objects because they function as a powerful technology. Ennin and his contemporaries believed that some portraits depicted elements of the deity's actual physical appearance, which devotees glimpsed either in their dreams or in waking visions. The more accurate the portrayal of a given deity, believers held, the more powerful the miracles that deity would perform in response to prayers.

Ennin's diary belongs to the well-established Buddhist genre of pilgrim's travel accounts (Fig. 3). Because monks wrote these books for the benefit of Buddhists who were considering making similar journeys, they did their best to provide accurate descriptions of foreign lands. Remarkably open about the frustrations of travel in China, Ennin admits to telling the authorities that he was Korean. Lying about his identity may have violated his ordination vows, but the Buddhist doctrine of expedient means justified this and other subterfuges that allowed him to continue his studies in China. His unusual candour



(Fig. 2) Portrait of Ennin
Japan, 1000–1100
Height 130 cm, width 76 cm
Ichijoji, Hyogo prefecture, Japan
(After Reischauer, 1955, frontispiece, xxi)

(Fig. 1) Map of Ennin's travels
(After Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Curtis,
Voyages in World History, 2nd edition;
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(Fig. 3) Title page of the Reischauer volume

makes his account particularly reliable: historians value a primary source whose author can admit to being dishonest.

In 1955, Edwin O. Reischauer translated the diary from classical Chinese into English and wrote an accompanying volume titled *Ennin's Travels*, and in 1990, Fukaya Ken'ichi published a detailed, annotated edition of the original diary with a Japanese translation. The translations in this article are Reischauer's with some minor changes prompted by Fukaya's notes. References give the page in the Reischauer translation and the date of the diary entry in month-day-year format.

Ennin travelled as a member of the eighteenth and final official delegation from Japan to the Tang court in 838 (in 894 the Japanese cancelled the last scheduled mission). The head of the delegation, or the ambassador Fujiwara no Tsunetsugu (796–840), was a scholar of Chinese literature, which may be why he was chosen for the position (Waley, p. 138). Ennin mentions by name at least thirty more members of the delegation, including himself, the monk Ensai (d.

877), and various officials. A total of 651 men, among them some 200 oarsmen, travelled on four ships (Borgen, p. 7). The Koreans served as interpreters for the Japanese, and the delegation encountered Korean communities everywhere they went along the coast.

The ostensible purpose of the Japanese visit was to present gifts, typically indigenous products like rare seashells, knives with silver inlay, brushes, or rock crystal rosaries, and to receive gifts such as textiles, incense, perfumes, medicine and books from the Tang emperor in return. The Japanese also took advantage of the mission to seek the most up-to-date intelligence about the Chinese, since more than 30 years had passed since the visit of their previous embassy in 804–806 (Borgen, p. 10).

From the moment the Japanese ships departed, they encountered uncertain winds. Finally under way after more than a week, they had to sail at night and use flares to signal their sister ships. On the seventeenth night of the voyage, the lead vessel observed the fourth ship sailing away from them. Uncertain that they would meet again, 'the Ambassador for the first time made a drawing of the Bodhisattva Kannon,' and asked him and the other monks 'to read scriptures and pray' (6–24–838; Reischauer, p. 2–3). When caught in storms, sailors and seagoers often turned to the Buddhist deity of compassion, Kannon (Ch. Guanyin; Skt Avalokiteshvara). Although Ennin does not say so directly, it is likely that the ambassador did not make the drawing himself but entrusted the task to an artist member of the delegation who made other paintings for the ambassador while in China.

This is why Ennin's account is so important. He reports how people at the time understood what we nowadays collect as Buddhist art—here, drawing functions as a form of prayer to Kannon. On board ship at night, the artist must have used only a brush and paper to make a simple sketch. Most of the portraits of Kannon/Guanyin that survive today—see, for example, a painting from the San Francisco Asian Art Museum—seem much more finished than anything produced under the conditions Ennin describes (Fig. 4). Cave 17 at Dunhuang preserves one sketch of Guanyin notable for its lack of artistry (Fig. 5). Describing it as 'drawn with stiff and unskilled strokes', Danielle Elisseeff notes two 'particularly clumsy additions': a lotus stem that stands near to but not in the bodhisattva's poorly rendered left hand, and a glass goblet that hovers awkwardly above his right thumb (Giès, p. 75, description of pl. 56). Might

these flaws indicate a votive drawing made during a crisis?

For the next eight days Ennin's ship battled continuing storms until it washed up off the coast near Yangzhou, where the waves dashed the ship on the rocks and it broke apart. Just as the crew and passengers were about to drown, a small Chinese boat rescued them. Someone in the delegation vowed—if they survived—to commission copies of Chinese paintings of the bodhisattva Myōken and the Four Heavenly Guardian Kings, who were also credited with the power to save people in danger on sea voyages.

The delegation sends an artist to make the copies at the Kaiyuan monastery, one of the largest monasteries in Yangzhou, "but for some reason the regulations do not allow foreigners to enter the monastery buildings at will," Ennin reports, "and the officers of the monastery would not allow him to draw the pictures" (8–3–838; Reischauer, p. 26). Even though Ennin is puzzled, the Chinese reluctance to grant access to the powerful Buddhist images makes sense. They wanted to keep the deities' power for themselves and their allies, and the local officials did not know whether or not they could trust the Japanese.

But while the Japanese delegation waited for three months before they received formal permission, Ennin encountered no such difficulties there several months later when he personally commissioned three copies each of paintings of Zhiyi (538–597), the



(Fig. 4) Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin) with willow sprig
From Dunhuang, Gansu province,
China, Tang dynasty (618–907), c. 900
Colours on ramie
Height 161.3 cm, width 50.8 cm
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
The Avery Brundage Collection (B62D10)
(© Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. Used by permission)

founder of the Tiantai school, and Huisi (515–577), the monk he honoured as the second patriarch—perhaps because the embassy artist Awada no letsugu made preliminary sketches in the temple but completed the final paintings in the privacy of his rooms (1–3–839; Reischauer, p. 67).

Why did Ennin commission these particular paintings? As Cynthea Bogel explains, another

returned monk, Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon school, brought back paintings from China in 806 because he believed that accurate images facilitated the transmission of the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, to the unenlightened (Bogel, p. 153).

Several inventories list the items that Ennin brought back with him. The most detailed, An



(Fig. 5) Avalokiteshvara
From Cave 17, Dunhuang,
Gansu province, China,
c. 9th–10th century
Ink and colours on paper
Height 48.5 cm,
width 32.8 cm
Musée Guimet
(MG 17671)
(Image: BnF, Dist.
RMN—Grand Palais/
Image BnF/Imaginechina)

inventory of newly acquired Buddhist materials in China (*Ru Tang xinqiu shengjiao mulu*, T. 2167, pp. 1078–84), divides the materials into Buddhist sutras, rubbings of steles and epitaphs, poetry, paintings, and metal printing plates, categorizing them by the place (Yangzhou, Chang’an, and Mt Wutai) Ennin acquired them. Some of these paintings survive in Japan, apparently in the Daigoji temple, Kyoto: these examples include drawings of Fugen Enmei (Skt Vajramoghasamayāsattva), an esoteric form of Samantabhadra, drawings associated with the Garbha Mandala, and a drawing of the Eight Great Vidyarajas (email correspondence from Mimi Yiengpruksawan, 12 October 2013).

After they commissioned the copies, Ennin and his companions remained in Yangzhou, where he awaited permission to visit Mt Tiantai in Fujian, the Chinese headquarters of Ennin’s own Tendai sect. Ennin visited the Kaiyuan monastery at Chinese New Year (1–17–830; Reischauer, p. 73). At the monastery, the monks laid out ‘forty-two portraits of sages and saints and all sorts of rare colored silks beyond count’. Ennin uses an unusual term for the portraits, *so’ei* 素影, which literally means ‘the shadow cast by the moon’; this may suggest only a faint likeness, the best that human artists could achieve when portraying the divine. (His inventory uses a different term, *shin’ei* 真影, for portraits of deceased monks like Amoghavajra [705–774, Ch. Bukong].) Ennin describes the portraits:

As for the countenances of the sages and saints, some were concentrating with closed eyes, others with faces uplifted were gazing into the distance, others looking to the side seemed to be speaking, and others with lowered visages regarded the ground. The forty-two pictures had forty-two different types of countenances.

The variety surprises Ennin, who sounds as if he expected the faces to be identical. Other variations also impressed him: ‘Some sat in the full cross-legged position and others in the half cross-legged position. Their postures thus differed.’ In addition, the monastery displayed portraits of two mythical Indian birds, and Samantabhadra (Ch. Puxian; J. Fugen), the bodhisattva of benevolence, and Manjushri (Ch. Wenshu; J. Monju), who were often paired.

That evening, the monks lit lamps, and then, sitting in front of the paintings, ‘intoned together Sanskrit hymns of praise. They went through the night without resting, lighting a cup lamp in front of each saint’. At daybreak the monks made offerings of medicine and

gruel, and at lunchtime presented a more elaborate meal with multiple dishes. Lay people sponsored a vegetarian feast for the monks, who repeated the same prayers and offerings on the second night. The ritual continued for two days and two nights.

Ennin never obtained permission to proceed to Mt Tiantai in Fujian province. Viewing Ennin as an ‘ecclesiastic’ or ‘scholar-monk’, the Chinese authorities decided that he was too old to qualify for long-term support for his studies (Waley, p. 3, note 7). They allowed the much younger Ensaï, a ‘student-monk’, to go to Mt Tiantai, where he remained until 877 (he died in a shipwreck on his way home).

After many misadventures, Ennin eventually arrived at Mt Wutai in Shanxi, where the artistry of one statue of Manjushri, the patron deity of the pilgrimage site, made a deep impression on him:

Its appearance is solemn and majestic beyond compare. The figure riding on the lion fills the five-bay hall. The lion is supernatural. Its body is majestic, and it seems to be walking, and vapors come from its mouth. We looked at it for quite a while, and it looked just as if it were moving.

5–17–840; Reischauer, p. 232

Ennin then relates the story of how the statue was cast. After six failed attempts, the sculptor had a vision of Manjushri. Only when he knew what the bodhisattva really looked like was he able to cast the statue successfully.

While at Mt Wutai, Ennin visited a Korean monk in a nearby village, where he saw a white stone statue of the Buddha Maitreya with some dirt on it. There he heard again of Manjushri appearing, this time to a Korean villager, ‘who dreamed one night that a monk came and said to him, “I am Manjushri. An ancient Buddha hall has fallen into ruin, and for years no one has repaired it. Its Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are buried in the ground. I have observed your faith and, consequently, have come to tell you about it”’ (2–14–840; Reischauer, p. 165–66). Manjushri instructed the Korean to dig in the southeast corner of his property, where ‘he dug up the earth with a hoe. When he had reached a depth up to his chest, he discovered the images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.’

Ennin captures a fascinating moment in the early history of Chinese archaeology. The excavated statues include images of the Maitreya, Manjushri and his lion, Samantabhadra, Guanyin, and ‘an iron cabinet holding the Buddha’s bones of more than twenty pounds weight’, an all-purpose label for the excavated

debris. The statues and Buddha bones are not simply for display: their age, as attested by Manjushri in the dream, adds to their power. That night Ennin joins the monks and lay people who pray and make offerings to the statues.

Leaving Mt Wutai, Ennin proceeded to the Tang capital of Chang'an (modern Xi'an), where he endured a series of increasingly harsher edicts from Emperor Wuzong (r. 840–46), who at first issued several orders to limit the number of monks before ordering the forced laicization of all monks. Ennin was eventually forced to give up his monk's robes and let his hair grow. Only then, after more than five years and one hundred requests was he finally given permission to return to Japan. In 846, as he was on his way to Shandong province to catch a ship, Wuzong died, and the new emperor Xuanzong (r. 846–59) rescinded all the bans. This change made it possible for Ennin to retrieve most of the books and paintings he had entrusted for safekeeping to a Korean friend, originally an interpreter for the Japanese delegation.

The eight-day trip home was smooth. On his return, Ennin became the abbot of the monastery on Mt Hiei outside Kyoto. One of the most famous teachers in the Pure Land tradition, he left a lasting legacy that includes the books, paintings and knowledge of rituals that he had brought from China, as well as his diary—one of the most informative and fascinating historical documents of all time. It provides clear insight into how one Buddhist pilgrim viewed the portraits of deities, both painted and sculpted, that he saw on his journey through China. Calling these portraits 'shadows cast by the moon', Ennin judges them by their accuracy, a thought-provoking standard given how few mortals ever glimpsed a bodhisattva or deity.

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